



INTERVIEW

WITH TRACY GRIMM

Tracy Grimm is the Associate Head of Archives and Special Collections and Barron Hilton Archivist for Flight and Space Exploration at the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections.



Tracy Grimm

In what ways did your education prepare you for a career in archives?

My undergraduate degree was in history and political science with a minor in chemistry. As a child, I was always interested in history but also science. I thought perhaps I wanted to be an art conservator,

a museum curator, or maybe an archaeologist. To explore careers during college, I volunteered at a small museum, the state archaeologist's office, and an art conservation laboratory. In my junior year, I took a local history course taught by an adjunct professor who was also the head of the local municipal archives. He tasked us with a semester-long research project to research building histories in a local neighborhood. This research meant going to the county and city archive to consult census records, tax rolls, deeds, 18th century maps, and city directories to trace the people who owned these buildings. Since this was Albany, New York, we were thrilled to discover that many of our plots had buildings on them in the early 1700s and surprised to find the plots, now in the center of a busy city, were cow pastures in the late 1600s. After a semester working in a real archive with very helpful staff, I discovered I loved local history! The next semester I was hired by the city archive as an intern for a special grant project and later as an assistant archivist for the city. I discovered a passion for the

applied history that archivists make possible and a passion for helping others discover how exciting history can be when you can form your own conclusions by searching and incorporating primary source documents into a search of topics from the past. After four years of working as an archivist, I attended graduate school for a master's in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archival Enterprise. Graduate studies deepened my understanding of information theory, archival theory, and paper preservation.

What are your responsibilities as the Barron Hilton Flight and Space Exploration Archivist?

My responsibilities as Barron Hilton Flight and Space Exploration Archivist center around collecting, preserving, and making accessible to students and researchers primary source collections that document the activities and contributions Purdue alumni, faculty, and affiliated individuals have made to the development of flight and space exploration. A large part of my job involves working with people who have retired from careers in aerospace and would like to donate their personal papers from their experiences and work. Those papers might include things such as research notes, reports they authored, work journals, project files, memorandum, photographs, news clippings, and/or memorabilia. Another part of my job involves collaborations with Purdue faculty to integrate the flight archives' collections into course assignments. My role, along with the other Purdue archivists, is to teach students how to use primary sources—

how to identify relevant collections, interpret and understand documents and artifacts, and apply that understanding to their inquiry or research question such that when combined with secondary source readings for their courses, they can form original conclusions or insights based upon what they discover in the archival records. My other main responsibility as flight archivist is to facilitate public access to the collections. There are several ways we are able to share collections with the public; they include exhibitions in the Purdue Archives' exhibit area, information sessions for public groups, and our online digital finding aids and digital collections. We also use social media to share interesting research and snapshots of items from our collections.

What has been the most impactful experience in your position at the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections?

The most impactful experience in my position at the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections has been working with undergraduate students as a course-embedded archivist. In this role, I co-develop lesson plans and assignments that integrate archival literacy with departmental faculty. In this role, over the course of a semester I meet regularly with the classes and guide students as they learn archival research skills in the Archives' reading room. In some of the seminar courses I have worked with students who have been able to publish the original research they conducted. Collaborations with Purdue faculty to make original research possible, using archival collections that Purdue students can relate to because usually they are papers of fellow Boilermakers, is a unique and impactful experience for us archivists!

Why is doing undergraduate research with the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections important?

Purdue is fortunate to be able to offer undergraduate students hands on research experience with primary sources. Much like students practice research techniques in science labs, here at Purdue Archives, students have the opportunity to practice humanities research techniques and analysis with archival collections of local and Purdue history. The primary source research and critical-thinking skills

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required for archival research are easily transferable to any student's fields of study and to their future careers. In the course of archival research, students learn that one information source is usually never a dead end, and that the more you analyze and question information sources, the more insight they typically reveal. Most of all, students realize that Google searches, though convenient, only touch the tip of the iceberg when it comes to finding information, that not all sources are trustworthy and unbiased, and they should never be taken as evidence without good collaborative supporting evidence. These are important life and career skills to leave college with!

What is your advice for undergraduate students looking to get involved with archival research?

My advice for undergraduate students looking to get involved with archival research is to look for course descriptions that include visits to the Purdue Archives or archival research assignments that involve the Purdue Archives. Often times those courses may be seminar courses. Try to find a course that is about a topic you are interested in, even if it doesn't exactly relate to your major. For example, a course might be about an aspect of Purdue history, women's studies, the history of technology, cultural history, or the history of aeronautics. Don't be afraid to contact a Purdue archivist to set up a research appointment, even if you are not sure what your topic might be. Archivists are here to help students learn about archives and how to use them. Look through past issues of Purdue's *Journal of Undergraduate Research* and see which faculty members taught courses that enabled students to publish their research in *JPUR*, and seek a course taught by that professor.

How have the Archives been helpful in celebrating Purdue's 150th anniversary?

The Purdue Archives and Special Collections undertook and prepared the following initiatives and projects to celebrate Purdue's 150th anniversary:

Ideas Festival Lecture Organized and Presented
“What IF Psychedelics Can Heal?” author Michael Pollan (March 2019)

Book Researched, Written, and Published
Purdue at 150: A Visual History of Student Life.
Purdue University Press (Release date May 6, 2019)

Teaching and Learning: Courses Taught
Junior Research Seminar: Boilermakers: The Many Histories of Purdue (History 395, Professor Michael G. Smith with embedded archivist Adriana Harmeyer) students researched Purdue history (Spring 2019)

The Moon Race: America, Russia, and Apollo (History 395, Professor Michael G. Smith with embedded archivist Tracy Grimm) students research space archives (Fall 2018)

Print and Digital Archives (ILS 695, Professor Sammie Morris) students create online exhibit for 150th anniversary) (Spring 2019)

Undergraduate Research Collaboration
“Apollo in the Archives” undergraduate research poster/paper contest track in collaboration with Purdue Office of Undergraduate Research (Spring 2019)

Online Resources Released
Apollo in the Archives video
<https://youtu.be/CSRYYkMNDIY>

Purdue University Facilities and Buildings Historic Database <http://collections.lib.purdue.edu/campus/>

Memoirs and Memories Blog special features in 2018-2019 on international and diverse students in Purdue history (African American students; students from China; students from India)
<http://blogs.lib.purdue.edu/asc>

Purdue Historical Timeline (updated)
<http://collections.lib.purdue.edu/timelines/puhistorical>

Social Media collaboration with Purdue Today “From the Archives” series

Social Media collaboration with Aeronautics & Astronautics “Moon Landing Monday” series

Online Resources to be Released
Oral Histories portal (listen to/read interviews with people in Purdue's past) (completion Fall 2019)

Purdue historical texts online portal (digitized versions of the Purdue alumni directories, annual reports, and course catalogs available online for searching/viewing) (anticipated completion August 2019)

Social Media collaborations: Purdue Today “Then and Now” photo history series (ongoing through anniversary)

Exhibits Opened
“Apollo in the Archives: Selections from the Neil A. Armstrong Papers” (March-August 2019)

“Return to Entry” collaborative exhibition with Purdue Galleries (artists creating new art inspired by Neil Armstrong/Apollo collections) (March-April 2019)

“Around the World in 150 Years: Purdue's International Footprint” (January-March 2019)

“Building Purdue: 150 Years of the West Lafayette Campus” (August-December 2018)

Special Events Held
Exhibition opening reception and announcement of Carol Armstrong donation of Wright Brothers flyer fabric (April 2019)

“Return to Entry” opening exhibition event (April 2019)

“Apollo in the Archives” open house (July 2019)

Alumnus Magazine Collaboration
Collaboration with Alumni Association on providing content for forthcoming “150 Objects” in Purdue history special issue of the Purdue *Alumnus* Magazine

Commencement Booklet Collaboration
Collaboration with Registrar's Office to provide history of seal, images of campus and historical people/events for inclusion in May commencement booklets/programs

What impacts have the records in Purdue's collection had on celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing?

Purdue's Flight and Space Exploration Archives have had a large impact on the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing. Over the past two years various authors and film production companies contacted the archives and made research visits in preparation for books, theatrical release films, and television productions about the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing. In addition, a special history seminar course was offered in the fall of 2018 that allowed students to research and write about themes related to the Moon landing. Five of those students presented their papers at the spring 2019 Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference. By preserving and making accessible the papers of Apollo-era astronauts such as Neil Armstrong and Eugene Cernan, the Purdue Archives is and will continue to be a resource for scholars, students, filmmakers, and the public to explore and present new perspectives of the space age and the Apollo era.

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Interviewer



Eliza Van is a junior in Purdue's Honors College pursuing a dual degree in English from the College of Liberal Arts and human development and family studies from the College of Health and Human

Sciences. She is also studying two minors: sociology and women's studies. Van served as the coordinator for this volume of the *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research*. She is also involved as a Resident Honors Preceptor for University Residences, a writing tutor in Purdue's Writing Lab, and as the support group director for Purdue's chapter of Actively Moving Forward, a student-led grief group.